



## **Russian River Biological Opinion Update – February 2016**

The Sonoma County Water Agency is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. The following project updates provide a brief synopsis of current work. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit [www.sonomacountywater.org](http://www.sonomacountywater.org).

### **Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project**

Site identification, environmental studies and topographic surveys are nearly complete for the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Right-of-way staff are working closely with landowners on construction and maintenance easement issues. Two firms, Interfluve and ESA, are designing the second and third miles of habitat enhancement, respectively. The 90% plans for portions of Mile 2 have been submitted and are under review. The 90% plans for portions of Mile 3 are in progress.

### **Fish Monitoring**

The inflatable dam is not in use this year, due to the work on the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project. Without the dam, the Water Agency cannot use the video monitors traditionally deployed to count migrating adult Chinook, steelhead and coho. Instead, the agency installed a type of sonar technology (known as DIDSON) at the mouth of Dry Creek and has installed a video monitor at the Healdsburg fish ladder. Water Agency staff has observed about 3,931 Chinook.

### **Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement**

Construction has stopped and started several times during the winter, as the river has risen and fallen. It is anticipated that construction will be complete in late Spring.

### **Russian River Estuary Management Project**

- The 2015 Lagoon Management Period ended on October 15. The Water Agency did not have an opportunity to implement an outlet channel during the management period. Since the management period ended, the estuary has closed three times. To reduce flood risks, Water Agency crews artificially breached the sand bar on November 2 (wave conditions closed the estuary later that day), November 5 and November 23. Dangerous beach conditions during a closure in December prevented the Water Agency from breaching the sand bar and water levels rose to approximately 12 feet, inundating the Jenner Visitors Center and briefly interrupting traffic on Highway 1. The estuary self-breached on December 12.
- Baseline monitoring of harbor seals and other pinnipeds is conducted regularly and prior, during and after every artificial breaching. Water quality monitoring at datasonde stations has ended for the season. The Annual Pinniped Monitoring Volunteer Training is scheduled for February 1 and 2.
- Field investigations of the jetty are complete. The purpose of the studies are to determine if and how the jetty impacts the formation of the barrier beach and lagoon water surface elevation. Consultants are currently analyzing data and preparing a report, which is expected to be released in February.

### **Fish Flow Project**

Work is occurring internally on the preparation of the draft Environmental Impact Report for the Fish Habitat Flows and Water Rights Project. The EIR is being prepared by Water Agency staff, with assistance from consultants on some areas of impact analysis. A draft EIR is anticipated to be released in Spring 2016.

### **Interim Flow Changes**

To preserve water in Lake Mendocino, the Water Agency went to the State Water Board to request additional reductions in releases from Lake Mendocino; on June 17, the State Water Board issued an amendment to the TUCO. As a result, the minimum flow requirement in the upper river was 25 cfs and 50 cfs in the lower river.

The TUCO expired on October 27. PG&E filed another variance with FERC to reduce flows in order to perform major maintenance on its penstock. Depending on levels in Lake Mendocino, the Water Agency may file another Temporary Urgency Change Petition (TUCP) with the State Water Board to preserve water in the lake. If a TUCP is not filed for hydrologic reasons, one will be filed in order to comply with the Biological Opinion.

### **Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation**

- The annual Dry Creek Community meeting was held on January 14 at the Lake Sonoma Visitors Center. Approximately 50 people attended.
- The annual Public Policy Facilitating committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 3, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Westside Water Education Center, followed by field trip to Mirabel Project and Dry Creek, with the signing of NOAA's first Safe Harbor Agreement.



*Coho salmon detected by Water Agency equipment.*